



The National Flag, as it was known in the exile years: now lost.

South African Languages

The attached text is reproduced from the very full and clear Wikipedia article on “Languages of South Africa.”

This Wikipedia text gives us a very good empirical spread of data relevant to the general status of languages in South Africa, to start our course with, plus a large number of useful hyperlinks to satisfy the curious.

Constitution

In addition to the factual basis, the Wikipedia page quotes the parts of the South African Constitution that are relevant to the question of languages, reproduced below.

It is in the Constitution that the “official” languages are named as such.

The Constitution declares an explicit intention to restore the indigenous languages of our people and to repair the damage done to them under apartheid.

We will accept this, without question, as a good and necessary aim of the Constitution, but we will continue to ask the question during the course: Has the SA Constitution been obeyed in this regard?

The National Flag

Not everyone knows that the black green and gold flag, now frequently referred to as “the ANC flag”, was in the exile days known as the National Flag. This example can remind us that the struggle was to come back to ourselves, to recover what is ours, and to be ourselves; yet we did not always succeed. The struggle for languages is, likewise, a struggle for South African characteristics.

In the case of the National Flag, it was set aside during the negotiations that led to the democratic breakthrough of 1994. It was replaced by something put together by a graphic designer, working for the old regime since 1977, by the name of [Frederick Gordon Brownell](#): a respectable man.

Languages, too, can be lost in a respectable way, if life is presumed to be improved, or modernised, by the loss of what is ours, and its substitution with something else.

From the South African Constitution:

1. The official languages of the Republic are [Sepedi](#), [Sesotho](#), [Setswana](#), [siSwati](#), [Tshivenda](#), [Xitsonga](#), [Afrikaans](#), [English](#), [isiNdebele](#), [isiXhosa](#) and [isiZulu](#).
2. Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.
3. (a) The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.
(b) Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents.
4. The national government and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor their use of official languages. Without detracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.
5. A [Pan South African Language Board](#) established by national legislation must
 - (a) promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of -
 - (i) all official languages;
 - (ii) the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and
 - (iii) sign language; and

(b) promote and ensure respect for -

(i) all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa,

including [German](#), [Greek](#), [Gujarati](#), [Hindi](#), [Portuguese](#), [Tamil](#), [Tselele](#) and [Urdu](#); and

(ii) [Arabic](#), [Hebrew](#), [Sanskrit](#) and other [languages used for religious purposes](#) in South Africa.

— Constitution of the Republic of South Africa^[10]

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Languages of South Africa, Wikipedia, 2013](#)
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).